

**Suggested Remarks**  
**Steven Edminster, USAID/OEDG**  
**Transparent and Accountable Governance**  
**Project Mindanao Coalition for Transparent**  
**and Accountable Governance Conference**  
**Waterfront Insular Hotel, Davao City**  
**February 9, 2007, 9:00 a.m.**

Distinguished Guests;

Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to join you for this conference that brings together partners from the Mindanao Coalition for Transparent and Accountable Governance, or MCTAG, under the Transparent and Accountable Governance (TAG) project. This event aims to provide the opportunity for you, as representatives of local government and the business and NGO sectors, to share with one another best practices and

lessons learned, assess what has worked well and what hasn't, and formulate recommendations on future directions for improving local governance.

The U.S. Government's support for local governance in the Philippines is part of a broader effort through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to assist partners working to strengthen democratic institutions and practices around the world. U.S. Government-funded democracy and governance programs worldwide focus on the key sectors that contribute to democratic development - from building the capacity of civil society, strengthening the rule of law, supporting electoral reform and more transparent and representative political

parties, and last, but certainly not least, improving governance at both the national and local levels.

In the Philippines, we believe that U.S. Government support in the areas of democracy and governance, along with our work in economic policy reform, conflict reduction, health, environment and education are all contributing towards development in the country, particularly in Mindanao where a majority of our resources are focused.

While there are many pressing issues in all of these sectors, local governance here in Mindanao has a special significance. Since cities are the engines of most countries' economic growth, the TAG Project's work in

16 cities here in Mindanao has been particularly important. With TAG's help, these city governments have reduced the cost of doing business by enhancing the responsiveness of city governments to business. When taken together with other important factors like the dynamism of the local economy, and the existence of sufficient infrastructure and human resources, these reforms send a very positive message to potential investors.

Ultimately, as TAG cities become more competitive and attract more business activity, the poor gain faster and greater access to the benefits of economic growth, and city governments can better address the needs of their residents.

I have also been very impressed with your collective approach to improving city governance embodied in the MCTAG and City Coalitions for Transparent and Accountable Governance (CCTAGs) under the TAG project. As representatives of the business community, non-governmental organizations and city governments, you are working together to ensure that all have been included in the dialogue on how to improve government services to make them more friendly to both business and the average person. This open and collaborative approach is not only important in its own right, but also results in better, more practical solutions for real problems.

In closing, I am looking forward to meeting with you today and hearing your views on both the innovations and challenges to local governance here in Mindanao. We at USAID hope that you find this event a useful opportunity to network and learn from each other. Having worked on the TAG project for more than three years now, I have been very impressed with what I have seen. Still, I feel confident that a great deal more is achievable and that the best days of TAG and local governance in Mindanao lie not too far ahead.

Thank you and good evening.